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MAKING SURE THEY'RE LEARNING



Assessment

If the prime responsibility of teachers 'is not to teach, but to ensure that students learn' (Dimmock 1993), then the prime purpose of assessment is to ensure that learning has taken place. Teachers need to know what their students know and can do, in relation to target learning outcomes. They are then able to put in place a learning program that will enable students to make further progress. A further purpose of assessment is to be able to report on student competence and achievement.

Over the past ten years, with the increased focus on the importance of assessment and the advent of resources such as First Steps, the National Statements and Profiles, National Literacy Benchmarks, The Early Years, Cambourne's Frameworks, the ESL Bandscales and Scales, there has been a stronger emphasis on integrating assessment, learning and teaching. The middle years of schooling have not been so amenable to these developments.

As students make the transition from upper primary to lower secondary school, the stark differences experienced in curriculum, pedagogy and organisation carry over into the assessment regime they face. Part of the transition experience is an increase in the seriousness with which the community regards the business of schooling. The process of sifting and sorting students for further phases of education and for life beyond schools starts in earnest in early secondary school. As a consequence, the assessment policies and practices of most middle schools, and the formality and weight put on the reliability of assessments, reflect this increase in seriousness.

Adolescent learners are faced with a diet of frequent, content-focused testing within each learning area; the advent of formal 'exams' in senior schools; and a much stronger emphasis on formal expository writing. The purpose of the assessment process shifts to a



preoccupation with the allocation of grades or levels. This information often starts to count towards the 'external' purpose of assessment, to meet requirements for access to learning areas in senior secondary years, or for certification.

There is much more of a feeling in the middle-years context that assessment is something that is 'done' to students. The assessment tasks that students face are not always relevant, and the literacy demands of some assessment tasks often, unwittingly, set some students up to fail.

The principles that apply for learning and teaching and the learning emphases for adolescents need to also apply directly to assessment. The Curriculum Framework (1998, pp. 37-9) provides the following principles of assessment for Western Australian schools:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| Valid | Assessment should provide valid information on the actual ideas, processes, products and values expected of students. |
| Educative | Assessment should make a positive contribution to student learning. |
| Explicit | Assessment criteria should be explicit so that the basis for judgements is clear and public. |
| Fair | Assessment should be demonstrably fair to all students and not discriminate on grounds that are irrelevant to the achievement of outcomes. |
| Comprehensive | Judgements on student progress should be based on multiple kinds and sources of evidence. |

Improving the assessment regime

The regime typically encountered by adolescents in the middle years tends to be formal and does not always match well with their learning characteristics, or with the teaching and learning emphases required for this group of learners. Some ways of improving the assessment regime are described below.

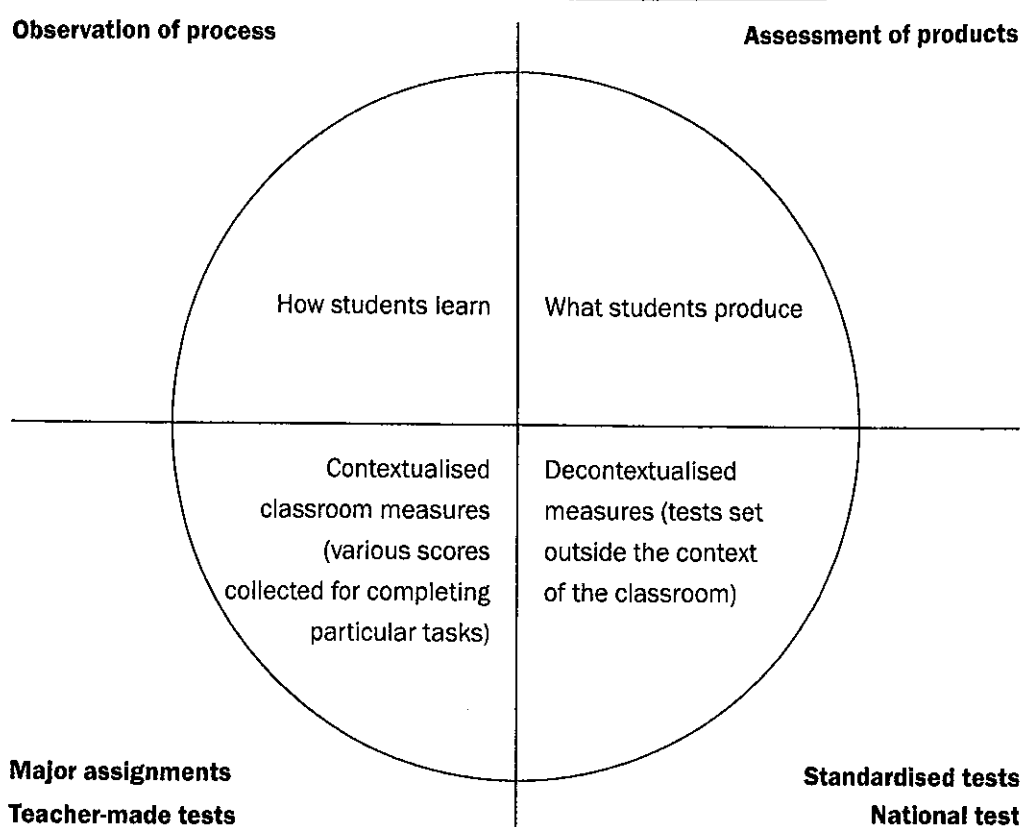
Improving the variety and range of assessments

If learning experiences are to be varied and challenging, so too must the assessment! An expanded range of broad, well-designed assessment tasks should provide opportunities for observation and assessment of performance, and the collection of hard and soft data for individual and group work. These should reflect the spread of needs and interests of students in each classroom.

Every teacher knows a great deal about their students' learning. They gain rich information about behaviour, performance, strengths and weaknesses through 'kid-watching' (Goodman 1985) as they observe students working on tasks. Multiple kinds and sources of evidence can be collected that help them make judgements about students' achievement. Judgements about how well students have demonstrated particular learning outcomes need to be based on evaluations of both processes and products, over a period

of time and in a range of different contexts. 'On balance' judgements should take into account the relative weight of the evidence collected.

METHODS OF LITERACY EVALUATION



Source: Adapted from Anthony, Johnson, Mickelson & Preece 1991.

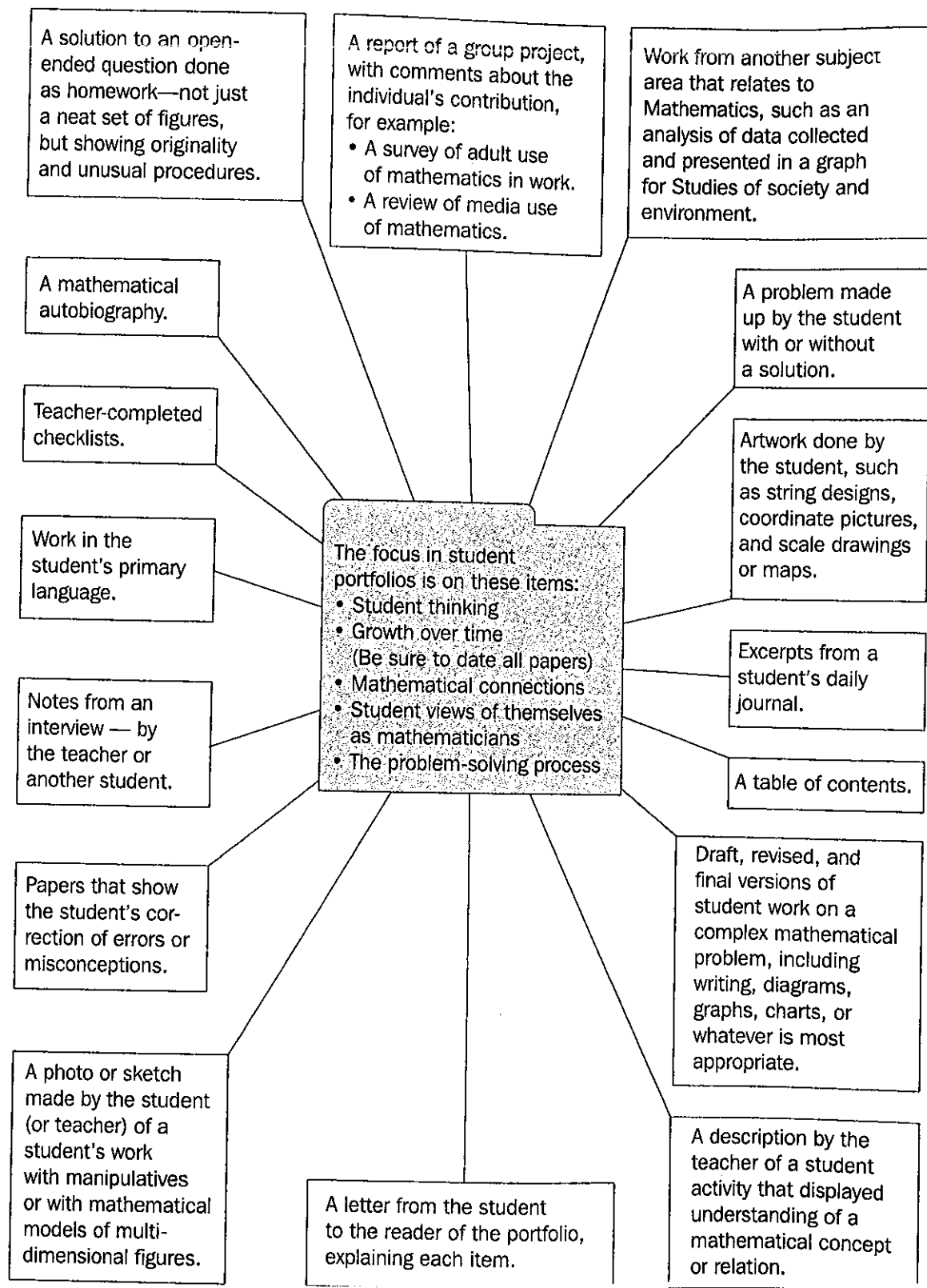
Constructing purposeful assessment

Adolescents are less accepting of the ritual of formal assessment. As a consequence, the assessment regime needs to be ongoing, and students' learning outcomes need to be monitored in contexts that are perceived to be 'life like'. There are multiple kinds and sources of evidence that can be used to make judgements on student achievement. The range of assessment methods teachers may use includes: student portfolios, peer assessment, student/teacher conferences, performance assessment, tests, projects, reports and assignments, open-ended assessment tasks, marking keys, progress maps, direct observation, and checklists.

Student portfolios are a collection of students' work that connect separate items to form clearer and fuller pictures of each student as a learner. They are a valid and reliable source of evidence for making judgements about student achievement. They show students' ability to apply their skills in a range of situations. Portfolios can be used to demonstrate evidence that incremental steps of progress are being made. They can be used in one learning area, or can include work across a range of learning areas.



INSIDE A PORTFOLIO



Source: Stenmark 1991, p. 337.

Different types of portfolios serve different purposes:

- ✱ Working portfolios contain sketches, notes, half-finished drafts and completed work. These provide an interactive context for ongoing instruction and feedback.
- ✱ Documentary portfolios contain collections of students' work assembled specifically for assessment. They contain final products of student work as well as evidence of the processes that students use to develop those products.
- ✱ Show portfolios contain selections of materials designed to reflect the best of student work. These can be used for certification, as well as classroom assessment.

Portfolio assessment is a process that provides visible evidence that students are making progress. Portfolios are particularly useful for students who need a longer time to move from one level to the next, because fine-grained evidence of achievement, including teacher observations, checklists, student drafts, journal writing examples, self- and peer-evaluation sheets, audio and video tapes of student work etc., can be included. The criteria for portfolio assessment should alter as tasks, demands and student understandings change. Purpose statements and 'road maps' or guides can lead the reader through the portfolio. Captions or statements attached to each document are also helpful, because these can describe what the document is, why it has been included, and what learning outcomes it demonstrates. They also require summaries or final reflective statements, to summarise documents in the portfolio and to articulate what has been learned.

Some of the issues related to portfolio assessment can be determined by developing a whole-school portfolio policy or statement. Some of the issues that would need to be clarified at the whole-school level would include determining:

- ✱ the purpose for implementing portfolio assessment;
- ✱ which teacher/s (or which learning area/s) will trial the use of portfolios—and over what period of time;
- ✱ how parents will be notified of the move towards portfolio assessment;
- ✱ the purpose of the portfolios;
- ✱ the range of samples within the portfolios;
- ✱ logistics related to storage;
- ✱ whether the portfolios will remain at school and be handed to students' new teacher/s each year—or whether they will be sent home at the end of each year;
- ✱ the target audience for portfolios;
- ✱ the balance between student self-selection of samples and teacher-nominated pieces;
- ✱ ways in which portfolios would be reported on;
- ✱ times when portfolios would be sent home for parental feedback;
- ✱ the importance of planning for organisational time so that students can sort, select and incorporate samples in their portfolio; and
- ✱ ways in which students who require additional support to build up their portfolio can be assisted.

Portfolios serve different purposes as students move towards becoming independent learners. Examples of such purposes are outlined in the following table.



YEAR GROUP	PURPOSE OF PORTFOLIO	AUDIENCE FOR PORTFOLIO
Years 5, 6 and 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✱ To demonstrate the learning process ✱ To develop skills of reflection and self-evaluation ✱ To encourage goal setting ✱ A means of communicating with parents ✱ To demonstrate achievement 	<p>Students</p> <p>Parents</p>
Year 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✱ To demonstrate the learning process ✱ To develop skills of reflection and self-evaluation ✱ To encourage goal setting ✱ A means of communicating with parents ✱ To demonstrate achievement 	<p>Students</p> <p>Parents</p>
Year 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✱ To demonstrate the learning process ✱ To develop skills of reflection and self-evaluation, including realistically evaluating own strengths and interests in terms of future subject and study path choices ✱ To encourage goal setting with longer term goals becoming more significant ✱ A means of communicating with parents ✱ A means of collecting documentation that will be useful in career/education placing ✱ To demonstrate achievement 	<p>Employers</p> <p>Further study</p> <p>Institutions</p> <p>Career advisers</p> <p>Students</p> <p>Parents</p>
Years 10, 11 and 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✱ A means of collecting best samples of work produced in each learning area ✱ A means of collecting documentation that will be useful in career planning and in interviews ✱ To set goals, both short and long term ✱ To facilitate reflection and self-evaluation ✱ Communication with parents ✱ A means of demonstrating achievement 	<p>Employers</p> <p>Further study</p> <p>Institutions</p> <p>Career advisers</p> <p>Students</p> <p>Parents</p>

The changing nature of the portfolio.

Teachers need to know what their students know and can do, in relation to target learning outcomes. They are then able to put in place a learning program that incorporates strategies that will enable students to make further progress.

Peer assessment encourages students to make decisions about their peers' performance, based on explicit, jointly negotiated or predetermined criteria.

Student/teacher conferences involve students and teachers in joint negotiations about performance and follow-up action.

Performance assessment focuses on students' performances or products that are used to demonstrate the degree to which students can apply and demonstrate their learning.

Tests measure a sample of student performance at a particular point in time, under standardised conditions. It is important to keep in mind that traditional testing methods are useful, but that they can be narrow in scope and do not always allow students to demonstrate a wide range of skills. They also do not always allow for different learning styles or unexpected responses.

Projects, reports and assignments encourage students to engage in in-class and/or out-of-class research activities.

Open-ended assessment tasks provide different entry points and different points of assessment integrated within the task. Teaching can be targeted at the point of need, as students can work at their own rate, and at their own level of ability. Open-ended tasks are problem-solving tasks. They provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their skills and knowledge, to utilise their different learning styles and to demonstrate different learning outcomes. They also provide opportunities for developing and refining creative thinking and problem-solving skills. Assessment criteria for open-ended tasks needs to cater for a range of levels. The criteria does not always have to be fixed in advance. Students will often demonstrate higher levels of understandings or outcomes that were not envisaged as being part of the task. These can be recorded for future reference.

Students perform better when they know and understand the criteria that will be used for assessment and evaluation. When goals and assessments are known in advance, the results reflect what students know and can do, as opposed to reflecting how well students anticipated what would be contained in the test.

Marking keys help teachers to:

- ✱ set clear guidelines;
- ✱ assess content objectives and student outcomes;
- ✱ provide detailed feedback; and
- ✱ assist students to improve on previous work.

Marking keys help students to:

- ✱ stay on task;
- ✱ know what the teacher wants; and
- ✱ improve on previous work.

Examples of marking keys are on pages 51 and 52.



MARKING KEY FOR INTERVIEWING

TOPIC: _____

DATE: _____

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: _____

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: _____

A MATTER—4 MARKS

1. Good evidence of research displayed. _____
2. Effective open-ended questions constructed. _____
3. Questions display a good understanding of issues/topic. _____
4. Evidence of active listening. Construction of questions arising from comments made by interviewee. _____

B MANNER—4 MARKS

1. Confident manner. _____
2. Speaks clearly and audibly. _____
3. Gives appropriate body messages to interviewee. _____
4. Pace of delivery is appropriate. _____

C METHOD (STRUCTURE)—2 MARKS

1. Interview contained a clear introduction. _____
2. Questions asked in a logical order. _____

TOTAL: _____

A MATTER—4 MARKS

1. Sufficient evidence of research displayed. _____
2. Demonstrates a good understanding of topic/issues. _____
3. Ideas well supported, with appropriate examples and details. _____
4. Reasons effectively answered the questions asked. _____

B MANNER—4 MARKS

1. Answers questions confidently. _____
2. Speaks clearly and audibly. _____
3. Gives appropriate body messages to interviewee. _____
4. Pace of delivery is appropriate. _____

C METHOD (STRUCTURE)—2 MARKS

1. Answers ordered in a logical fashion. _____
2. Answers kept to the point, with the most important ideas addressed. _____

TOTAL: _____

ADJUDICATOR: _____

MARKING KEY FOR DEBATING IN SCIENCE

YEAR:

CLASS:

TOPIC:

DATE:

NAMES:

	AFFIRMATIVE									NEGATIVE								
	1 ST			2 ND			3 RD			1 ST			2 ND			3 RD		
	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2
MATTER—8 MARKS																		
1. The arguments used would appeal to the average, reasonable person.																		
2. A thorough understanding of the topic was displayed.																		
3. Arguments were well developed and supported with appropriate examples.																		
4. 1st speakers: Topic was clearly defined. Other speakers: Opposition's arguments were effectively refuted.																		
MANNER—8 MARKS																		
1. Speaker was clearly heard.																		
2. Good eye contact with audience was maintained (palm cards were unobtrusive).																		
3. Pace of delivery was effective.																		
4. Speaker's manner was confident and persuasive.																		
METHOD (STRUCTURE)—4 MARKS																		
1. Speech was clearly organised into a beginning, a well-developed middle and an end.																		
2. Good use was made of time allocation.																		
3. Showed evidence of the roles of different speakers (bonus mark).																		
INDIVIDUAL'S TOTAL (20)																		
TOTAL TEAM POINTS (60)																		



Students follow unique patterns of growth in any area of learning. Although these patterns are not age related, generalisations can be drawn from them and milestones can be observed and recorded on a **progress map**. Continuums of development, outcome statement levels and ESL Bandscales are all examples of progress maps. Most progress maps describe behaviours at various stages and incorporate a combination of descriptions of student learning and student work samples.

Some progress maps, such as outcome statements, reflect 'big picture' or global descriptions intended for systemic, summative judgements. Others, such as the First Steps developmental continuum, use fine-grained descriptions, which can be useful for diagnostic purposes. Some students take a long time to move across large, significant outcome levels, and therefore teachers might prefer to use finer-grained information to indicate that small, incremental steps of progress are being made towards outcome levels.

Spelling: Developmental Continuum / Individual Student Profile

Indicators For Spelling Developmental Continuum

Teachers can identify a child's phase of development by observing that the child is exhibiting all the key indicators of a phase. It should be noted however, that most children will also display indicators from other phases.

Phase 2: Semi-Phonetic Spelling

In this phase children show developing understanding of sound-symbol relationships. Their spelling attempts show some evidence of sound-symbol correspondence.

Phase 3: Phonetic Spelling

In this phase writers are able to provide an almost perfect match between sound and letters. Letters are chosen on the basis of sound regard for conventional letter patterns. Letters are meaningful and represent the sound of the word.

Phase 4: Transitional Spelling

(from sounds to structures)
In this phase writers are moving away from heavy reliance on the phonetic strategy towards the use of visual and meaning-based strategies. They may still have difficulty recognising if a word is spelled correctly but are able to proof their known bank of words.

LEVEL 4 Speaking and Listening

Level 4 outcomes:

- 3.1 Interacts for specific purposes with people in the classroom and school community using a small range of text types.
- 3.2 Recognises that certain types of spoken texts are associated with particular contexts and purposes.
- 3.3 Usually uses linguistic structures and features of spoken language appropriately for expressing and interpreting ideas and information.
- 3.4 Reflects on own approach to communication and the ways in which others interact.

Texts

At level 4, a student:

- 4.1 Interacts confidently with others in a variety of situations to develop and present familiar ideas, events and information.
- Evident when students, for example:*
 - Present a strong point of view to friends in a group, offering some considered reasons or arguments.
 - Listen attentively and respond constructively to other points of view in group and class discussions.
 - Rehearse and tell a story to peers or younger children, using approaches that attempt to engage listeners.
 - Prepare and present to the class a detailed account on a known topic, showing attention to quality of content, organisation and method of presentation.
 - Prepare and present accurate summaries of decisions reached in group activities (the decisions the group was in favour of and the reasons for them).
 - Prepare a short set of questions for an interview seeking information about an issue or topic.
 - Offer explanations or lodge complaints which include one or two reasoned arguments.
 - Listen and respond to short presentations or arguments that offer alternative viewpoints on a familiar issue (challenge or comment on a point made).
 - Identify the main idea and supporting details of a spoken report and summarise it for others (presentations by peers or guest speakers on environmental issues, a current affairs report).

Contextual understanding

At level 4, a student:

- 4.2 Considers aspects of context, purpose and audience when speaking and listening in familiar situations.
- Evident when students, for example:*
 - Select a suitable text type according to purpose for speaking.
 - Recognise and discuss ways that physical conventions are used and understood differently in different socio-cultural contexts (that acceptable distance from others varies according to cultural factors, that eye contact may be regarded as aggressive, insolent or desirable according to context).
 - Discuss situations where slang and colloquial language might be considered suitable or unsuitable (at a formal school event or in the news on radio or television).
 - Consider when an audience is most likely to expect standard Australian English and discuss reasons.
 - Recognise and discuss some indicators of socio-cultural bias or prejudice in spoken texts (a speaker's use of discriminatory language).
 - Consider the needs of a familiar audience when preparing a spoken presentation (predict likely questions and prepare answers).

Reading

Students read a wide range of texts with purpose, understanding and critical awareness.

The student:

- 1 Responds to texts by demonstrating attending behaviours, recognising common elements and using strategies to access content in printed texts.
- 2 Engages in reading-like behaviour and demonstrates understanding that written symbols and illustrations convey information.
- 3 Uses basic strategies to locate, select and read a range of simple texts; recalls and discusses significant ideas from texts; and understands that people write about real and imagined experiences.
- 4 Integrates a range of strategies to interpret and discuss relationships between ideas, information and events in written texts; identifies and uses language structures; and recognises and discusses the use of symbols and stereotypes to make meaning.
- 5 Understands how language structures work to shape meaning; explains possible reasons for varying interpretations; and justifies own interpretation of ideas, information and events in texts.
- 6 Discusses and compares texts to examine issues, ideas and effects; pays attention to synthesising information from different sources to construct reasoned responses; and recognises that texts are constructed for particular audiences and purposes.
- 7 Draws on a repertoire of strategies, including knowledge of sociocultural contexts, to maintain understanding while reading, comparing and evaluating different texts containing complex issues.
- 8 Reads critically and discusses a wide range of complex texts; selects substantial evidence to justify own interpretations of those texts and identifies ways in which text structure can influence a reader's reactions.
- 9 Reads critically and reflects on all kinds of texts; synthesises ideas about texts in a compelling way; and relates specific issues and events to wider social issues and to personal experience.

Strand Outcome Statements

Examples of progress maps.

Direct observation is useful when students are actively engaged in a performance, production, presentation or process. Observational information can be recorded on informal running records or a retrieval chart or against a predetermined checklist of criteria.

Checklists make it easy for teachers to identify whether or not students are able to demonstrate particular learning outcomes. They can be prepared in advance, and should identify a clear set of criteria that both teacher and students can refer to. The criteria can be jointly negotiated. Each time a targeted skill is observed, the appropriate criteria is marked. Space should be allocated for writing informal comments alongside students' names. It is important to be unobtrusive whilst observing students and/or small groups as they work, and to allow time between observations to make notes and synthesise the information. The checklists should be kept, as they are a valuable resource for informing learning programs, when talking to parents, and when writing reports on individual students.



The following checklists provide an opportunity to note students' co-operative learning skills, as well as their skills and understanding in a particular learning area.



CHECKLIST FOR THE OBSERVATION OF SMALL-GROUP WORK

Names of group members	Group processes			Subject understandings		
	Ask to clarify/obtain further info.	Explain individual feelings/ideas	Interrupt/argue politely	Knows how energy is transferred in an energy interaction	Can explain how factors affecting friction can influence design	Can explain at a particle level, interactions of energy in energy transfer systems
Matt S.	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓		✓✓
Sarah		✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓
Phuong	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓
John	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓

SMALL-GROUP OBSERVATION IN SCIENCE

TOPIC: _____ CLASS: _____

YEAR: _____ DATE: _____

TASK: Vocabulary in Context

The students were able to:	George	Heidi	Lin	Scott	Wendy	Maria	Xiangyi	Eddie
1. Scan the text effectively	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
2. Read around the words in order to find clues for their meaning	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
3. Identify and transfer words to the Vocabulary in Context sheet	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
4. Transfer the meaning into their own words	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
5. Justify their interpretation of the meaning	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N	Y/N

Discriminating tools that provide diagnostic information

Often the things missing are the techniques and tools to assist with 'kid watching'. A range is provided in the following table.

Techniques and tools	Examples					
1. Student evaluation —a valid and valuable source of information that takes into account students' perspectives on a task or process, what they understand and what confuses them. May take the form of a checklist, oral reflection, reflective journal writing or a conference log recording a student/teacher interview.	<i>'I can't understand this book; it's too hard ...'</i> <i>'I know how to write topic sentences but I still don't know how to develop and support my ideas.'</i>					
2. Peer evaluation —students can be trained to evaluate their peers effectively against specific criteria.	<i>'The ideas in your essay are clearly organised but your essay ends too suddenly.'</i>					
3. Teacher jottings —about students' learning behaviour and understandings.	<i>'Trevor seems to have difficulty answering inferential questions.'</i>					
4. 'On balance' judgements —a weighing up of students' products and processes (completed over time and in a variety of contexts). Students' outcomes are measured against a continuum or sequence of outcomes.	A sequence of student outcomes:	Level One	Level Two	Level Three	Level Four	Level Five
		_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
		_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
		_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
		_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. Criteria checklists —a planned observation record of achievement of specific criteria. The teacher records observed student outcomes.	Criteria to be observed:	May	Joe	Tom	Bev	
	1. _____	✓	✓	×	✓	
	2. _____	✓	✓	×	✓	
	3. _____	×	✓	×	✓	
	4. _____	✓	✓	✓	✓	
6. Anecdotal information —incidental information that the teacher mentally notes, for example, noting the quality of the questions students ask. Contributes to a balanced picture of achievement.	<i>'Vivian takes an awfully long time to find what she's looking for in the library. I must ask her what strategies she uses for accessing information.'</i>					
7. Parent input —information that is observed in settings outside of school. Parents complete response sheets or provide anecdotal reference in homework diary.	<i>'Joseph had a lot of trouble with that assignment. He said he didn't know where to start.'</i>					
8. Portfolio —a collection of meaningful pieces of information that shows student achievement of processes and products over time. Contains relevant information using all of the above strategies for collecting information. Is referred to occasionally in order to make 'on balance' judgements.	<i>'When viewing this semester's work samples, self-evaluation sheets, teacher jottings and criteria checklists, it's easy to see that Chris has significantly developed his skills in organising and developing ideas in writing.'</i>					



Involving the learner

Adolescents are conceptually more sophisticated and are beginning to move towards becoming mature learners. If they are given opportunities to jointly negotiate clear criteria in advance and know what they are supposed to be learning, they do not have to guess what is in the teacher's head. Students can be encouraged to take ownership and control of their learning through self- and peer-assessment activities. Useful tools that involve the learner include self-evaluation sheets, marking keys, reflective journal writing, portfolio assessment and peer assessment.

Central to the task of improving assessment is the collection of baseline data, through the use of potent assessment tools (both qualitative and quantitative) that provide a rich source of diagnostic information. These can be used for a variety of purposes. Data collected at the school level provides a broad picture of the range of ability across the school. Data collected in the classroom provides an in-depth picture of what is happening in every classroom and in every learning area. The analysis of such data identifies strengths and weaknesses and indicates where strategies need to be put in place to ensure improvement. As problem areas are targeted, further data collections will indicate whether or not these various strategies are working. Ongoing assessment and monitoring processes enable teachers to continue to gather and compare information about the level of students' understandings and their learning skills, and provides accurate information for evaluation purposes.

TRY THIS

Making sure they're learning

- ✱ Use learning tools such as journals and portfolios to gain an on-going profile of what students are/are not learning.
- ✱ Use 'stick-its' to jot down comments whilst observing students working. Attach these to their work—always write comments in positive terms.
- ✱ Display the appropriate progress maps in the classroom for reference when discussing students' progress. Induct students into the progress map employed.
- ✱ Compile a 'bank' of checklists/matrixes that can be used to gather information about students' processes and products.
- ✱ Train students in peer- and self-assessment practices and give them plenty of opportunities to practise them.